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ABSTRACT

Founded by Don Bosco in 1859 in Turin, Italy, the Salesian Society helps disadvantaged youth in over 100 countries, according to 1991 data. Salesians operate technical training institutes and run numerous informal shops and training courses within their schools, orphanages, street children shelters, and youth centers. The institutes are financed through tuition, sale of services and goods produced in the training schools, and grant contributions. Attributes of Salesians and their work that contribute to their success include spiritual commitment, focus, the human factor, standards, long-term continuity, low costs, sustained financing, and modesty. Rapidly changing technologies, the consequent shift in the market demand for skilled workers, and the uneven use and applicability of new technologies in various regions of the world pose serious dilemmas for the technical institutes. Institutes respond by adding up-to-date techniques to training; closer, more systematic contact with local businesses is also required. In many developing countries, the job market is saturated or contracting. Salesians respond by setting up job placement offices and investigating ways to help graduates set up their own small businesses. Other dilemmas Salesians face are dealing with those too poor to help, the gradual rise of national personnel, and reliance on Divine Providence. The Salesian Society can reach its unfulfilled potential by adapting, opening up, and reaching out to the outside world. (YLB)

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The Don Bosco way to train disadvantaged youth

by R. W. Mashek

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The Don Bosco way to train disadvantaged youth

by R. W. Mashek

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I. Don Bosco's Salesians

The Salesian Society is an order of priests and brothers of the Roman Catholic Church, founded in 1859 in Turin, Italy by Rev. Giovanni Bosco. It includes an autonomous congregation of nuns, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, also known as the Salesian Sisters of Don Bosco. He named his order the "Salesians" after St. Francis de Sales, a Swiss bishop of the 16th century. The Church made him one of its saints, St. John Bosco, but he is most often referred to as just Don Bosco.

Don Bosco made it his mission to know and to help the children whom he saw fending for themselves on the streets of Italian cities. Instead of confining his assistance to charity, he set up shops and vocational schools to teach them manual skills and the elements of a wholesome life. His idea was to provide them with the means for earning a living and becoming responsible, productive adult citizens.

The approach created by Don Bosco and followed by Salesians to this day starts with personal attention and respect for each child. As stated in the writings of Don Bosco, its motivation is grounded in joy for life rather than pity for deprivation. Somewhat like Michelangelo's concept of freeing the beauty and form already inherent in a block of marble, the Salesians seem to have a knack for building upon the special talents, intelligence, and instincts of youth who have had to learn how to survive at an early age, rather than trying to mould them into a stereotypical personality or lifestyle. The approach involves a non-formalised transfer of personal and social ethical values that are not only Christian but more universally recognised and advocated. And the approach is completed with a practical objective: each youth's learning a skill sufficiently well to qualify him for earning a living for himself and his family.

The Society spread from Italy throughout Europe, particularly Spain, in the last half of the 19th century and from there to the Near East and Latin America. In this century, European Salesian missionaries expanded their presence and work to every region of the world, except for Islamic regions. Like other foreign missionaries, non-national Salesians were expelled from Mainland China with the ascendancy of Mao-Tse-Tung in the late 1940's and from Vietnam in 1975. With the installation of communist regimes in Eastern Europe following World War II, Salesians as well as other religious groups assumed anonymity in some countries in order to survive.

Adopting the governance model of the Roman Empire and ancient Catholic orders, the Salesians' headquarters are in Rome and headed by a Rector Major, who reports to the Pope. A Council of senior members advises the Rector General. Thence, the order is organised throughout the world into "Provinces," each headed by a Provincial Superior and his advisory council. A single country with strong Salesian presence, such as Brazil or Italy, is divided into several Provinces. Sometimes contiguous countries, such as Indonesia, the Philippines, and Papua New Guinea, form one Province. In still other cases, regions of Africa are part of Provinces with headquarters, for example, in Ireland and Poland. Whereas complete obedience to superiors is fundamental to the order, in practice discussion and dialogue seem to be the *modus operandi* for treating issues and reaching decisions on matters other than those of a religious nature. Salesian directors of technical institutes often appear to have nearly complete autonomy in financial, administrative, and academic matters.

In 1991, according to their own statistics, the Salesians numbered some 36,000 priests, brothers, sisters, and lay volunteers working in

over 100 countries, with particularly strong presence in Argentina, Brazil, India, Italy, the Philippines, Poland, Spain and several other Latin American countries, and a strong priority for expansion in Africa. They were running approximately 1,600 parishes, over 2,800 elementary schools, 650 secondary schools and colleges, 481 industrial skills trade schools, 53 agricultural vocational schools, 870 day-care centres, 154 medical dispensaries, 167 social welfare centres, and 90 programmes for orphans and street children. Precise statistics are not available, but a rough estimate of the youth they serve is 2.5 million.

A. The Salesians' role in training

As noted above, Salesian data show that they currently operate over 530 technical training institutes, both in the industrial arts and agriculture. More are in the process of establishment or in planning stages. In addition, they run numerous informal shops and training courses within their schools, orphanages, street children shelters, youth centres, and other Salesian institutions. While no two institutes are exactly alike, this discussion will attempt to construct a representative prototype, the likes of which the author has visited in Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Haiti, Indonesia, Israel, Nicaragua, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and the West Bank. Each institute will vary from the prototype in some respects or to some degree.

Technical institutes run by Salesian priests and brothers are almost always run for boys only, and those operated by the Salesian nuns are for girls. However, the formal schools are often co-educational, and some of the informal training programmes now include trainees of both sexes. Focus here is given to the institutes for boys because they are far more numerous and have a longer history.

A typical Don Bosco technical institute has a two-year or three-year training programme, usually referred to as "formal" in that it is recognised and accredited by national educational authorities as a secondary level course of tech-

nical studies. The nine- or ten-month annual schedule coincides with the local academic year. The daily instructional schedule is usually three hours in the morning and three in the afternoon, Monday to Friday. A detailed curriculum is carefully followed and usually approved by the government. Emphasis is given to practical, hands-on learning in the shops, supplemented by those paper-and-blackboard lessons in the classroom considered necessary and useful. Testing and grading of each trainee are regular and usually as precise as the trade skill will allow. Upon graduation, students have acquired skills to do a job, if available, and are eligible to enter advanced technical training institutions in their country.

Although the curriculum varies according to local conditions, the range of training offered for boys usually includes machine and metal work, electricity and basic electronics, printing, woodworking, and motor repair (sometimes vehicle repair, including automobiles). Where local industry is advancing rapidly, as for example in Israel and Italy, computer work and advanced electronics have been added to the curriculum, as well as more advanced forms of machine work. In less developed regions, for example Nicaragua and Haiti, where local demand is stronger for basic construction skills, such areas as masonry, carpentry, electrical wiring, and soldering are included. Training for girls usually consists of general homemaking, sewing, cooking, office work, and more recently computing. Often in Africa, Asia, and the Near East, courses and laboratories in the English language are offered as another skill important to performance on the job.

Admission is usually based on criteria of low-income level, satisfactory completion of primary schooling, and good personal character references. An institute will have a student body of 200 to 400. Generally, a trainee is expected to pay nominal tuition, his lunch, and the cost of his own tool kit. However, the tuition is waived in all or part for those who cannot pay, and many institutes charge no tuition at all. The poorest of the trainees are provided, with free lunches and their personal tool kits as well. Since a good number of institutes started years

ago as orphanages, a number have facilities for boarding trainees who are homeless or from rural villages.

In order to serve youth who are too poor to attend courses full-time and, thus, have to work during the day, many of the institutes have introduced evening courses over the last ten years. They are usually called "informal" courses because they are not officially accredited. They have durations of three months, six months, or one year, and organised curricula and testing systems.

Over the decades, European missionaries have founded and staffed institutes in developing countries. The instructors were priests and brothers with trade skills passed on for generations in the families and workshops of Europe. However, over years of expansion, multiplication of institutions, and relatively decreasing availability of European personnel, the instructional staff has become largely national laymen who are overwhelmingly Don Bosco graduates. A few European Salesian brothers are still to be found here and there. The director of an institute is typically a Salesian priest of European extraction, and other administrators a combination of priests, both European and national.

The ethical, moral dimension of the Salesian approach is perhaps as much a matter of everyday behaviour and personal relations as formalised teaching. The Salesians are generally very accessible to their young trainees, giving each considerable personal attention and counselling. Ethical and moral values are imparted, thus, through individual exchanges as much as through courses, classes, and talks. In countries where the overwhelming majority of the population is nominally Catholic, such as Argentina or the Philippines, teaching is given in the context of Catholic theology and rites. Elsewhere, in countries where Catholics are a small percentage of the population and of the enrolment in a Don Bosco institute, moral subjects are treated in the broadest ecumenical sense and participation in Catholic ceremonies is strictly voluntary. In some countries, their policy is to avoid religious proselytisation.

There is another standard characteristic to all Don Bosco institutes which a casual observer might overlook: sports. Schools in the centre of crowded cities have a large courtyard, which others may have made into a garden or lawn. The Salesians finish it off as a sports ground where the youngsters can play soccer, basketball, volleyball, and other outdoor games. In less crowded circumstances, spacious playing fields adjoin the classrooms and shop buildings. During the noon hour and recesses, the sports facilities are crowded with the trainees. During late afternoon hours and at weekends, the grounds are open to the public at large, and hundreds of youth avail themselves of the opportunity. Physical fitness and exercise is a basic ingredient of Salesian education and training.

It is not surprising that, as an Italian, Don Bosco made music a part of his programme for youth. Thus, one will find bands and choruses in some of the schools and institutes. However, the pressure to include as many youth as possible in the training programmes, the priority to allocate scarce resources to the purchase of machines and tools and to subsidise indigent trainees, and the reluctance of donors to contribute musical instruments have left music-making in a secondary position at best, and often without any role at all.

B. How are the institutes financed?

The operations of the institutes themselves often generate income in two ways: tuition and the sale of services and goods produced in the training schools. The rest comes from grant contributions from individuals and organisations. They are averse to assuming loans.

Over the last 150 years, Salesian work has received donations from many European individuals and organisations, both public and private, and in more recent times from North America. In the decades since World War II, they have found even more substantial support through their mailing campaign in the United States and from the foreign assistance programmes of the governments of Europe,

especially Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands, but as well as of Australia, Canada, Italy, New Zealand, the United States, and others. Local contributions still form a minor portion in the financing schemes but seem to be growing, as discussed below.

It is difficult to construct a representative financing portrait for a typical institute, in part because of great variations and in part because of inaccessibility of outsiders to financial records. Still, one can derive some general patterns.

Initial capital costs of land, buildings, and equipment are generally provided for by contributions. The land is often granted by a local benefactor, a family, or the local government. The original buildings, machinery, and equipment were in the past usually financed by contributions from European individuals or the governments of Belgium, Germany or the Netherlands. Currently, start-up capital costs are largely financed by funds originating from governmental programmes of Belgium, Germany and Italy, and general collections made by the Salesian order, notably in Spain and the United States. Ongoing and replacement capital costs for machinery and equipment are apparently the easiest to obtain in grants from the foreign aid programmes of European, North American, and South Pacific governments and private organisations. The foreign aid programme of Italy currently provides major support for the updating of machinery and equipment and technical assistance for installation and operation.

The financing of operational costs is more complicated and varied. The components - and possibilities - are as follows:

- Most of the institutes have devised means to earn income by making and selling products and/or rendering services. In some instances, institutes have managed to cover more than half of their operating budgets in this way.
- The institutes rely little on student fees. Some have no fee structure at all, and fur-

thermore subsidise lunches, uniforms, and personal tools of most of the trainees. Others may charge a modest but variable fee adapted to the trainees capacity to pay; often the fee is entirely waived. Yet, tuition fees may provide a small percentage of the total costs.

- Local governments may pay a part or all of the salaries of instructors of the accredited formal training programme, to the exclusion of the non-formal.
- Local businesses may make contributions, often as scholarships for a given number of students, which cover a percentage, albeit small, of all operational costs for that particular number of students.
- In much the same way, foreign assistance programmes such as that of the Netherlands, may make available a programme of scholarships.
- Another foreign institutional donor agency may be funding part or all of the non-formal training courses.
- Contributions from individuals and organisations directly to the institute may cover another small percentage of the costs.
- The rest, as needed, to keep an institute operating arrives as a general transfer of funds from the Province or from headquarters in Rome. The personnel costs of the Salesians themselves are usually covered by these internal transfers. The origins of these funds are unknown to the outsider and may be unknown to the director of the institute. These funds could come from: tuition money from the regular schools within the Province that educate youngsters from the middle and upper classes; or general collections made by the order from anywhere in the world.

C. The success of Salesian training

First of all, it must be made clear that there is no authoritative, scientifically conducted study

that definitively demonstrates or establishes the extent to which the Salesians are successful in helping disadvantaged youth become solid citizens. To the author's knowledge, there is no such study of Salesian activities in any one country or even one institution, with the possible exception of the well-known "La Florida" home and school for street boys in Bogotá, Colombia, which for over a decade has been supported, visited, and documented by interested parties from several countries. Furthermore, the Salesians themselves have few statistics that document the range and the results of their work. Other than basic financial, accounting, enrolment, and academic records, they generally do not seek or maintain data on their graduates, not even regarding graduates' first experience with the job market or further training. This situation is changing in some areas as contributors and international funders insist on knowing the experience of graduates.

And yet it is safe to say that the Salesians have had success, even impressive success, on a number of counts.

The proliferation of the order and its educational institutions across the globe during the last century is not suggestive of substandard or even mediocre performance. Few of its institutions have had to close for reasons other than political upheaval or natural disaster; on the contrary, they have endured, grown, multiplied, and adapted to changing circumstances.

Is their training technically adequate for the local market? Are their graduates able to make a living? Definite data is not available, but insights and opinions among credible observers are. And the burden of opinion is that Salesian technical institutes, including their vocational agricultural schools, are of high quality in both developing and developed countries. A survey conducted in 1988-89 of Salesian agricultural training schools in the Western Hemisphere by the Kellogg Foundation, one of the largest private foundations of the United States, concluded that they were the most effective institutes for training of rural youth and outreach

to local farmers, and hence it has begun to support them.

After decades of work, many of the technical institutes are institutions much respected in their cities and countries. A Don Bosco graduation certificate, from either a formal or an informal course, carries with it the good reputation of the institute. It is not merely ceremonial that the King of Thailand, who takes a serious interest in development, visits a training school run by Christians in his capital, the Don Bosco Technical Institute of Bangkok. It is not necessarily good national politics for the Indonesian Governor of East Timur to allocate extra resources to the Don Bosco agricultural school at Fuloro, nor for the United Nations Development Programme to entrust its vocational training and exchange programmes to the Salesian Technical Institute of Bethlehem as the more capable school of its kind in the area.

Local businesses and branches of international firms regularly interview and hire Don Bosco trainees a few weeks before graduation. When asked why they seek out these young men, recruiters reply that Bosconians are well-trained and are responsible workers. International firms engaged in state-of-the-art manufacturing, such as in Thailand, remark that although Don Bosco graduates are not fully prepared for the most advanced technical work, they are competent in the fundamentals and, above all, they know how to learn.

Even though Salesians make no particular attempts at leadership development, many graduates have experienced considerable upward social mobility. In one Caribbean setting, a considerable number of union leaders, company managers, and directors of private non-profit organisations happen to be Don Bosco graduates. In many other instances, one can find professionals, e.g., physicians, professors, and expert technicians who began their trek out of poverty through the only training or educational route available to them: a Don Bosco technical institute. However, the bias in these impressions is obvious; one is far more likely to encounter the successful individual

who credits his advance to the Salesians than one who is still on the assembly line or one who never found a job at all.

Are impressions, testimonials, opinions, and circumstantial evidence adequate to make a case for Salesian success? Or are these biases and acts of faith which tend to reinforce themselves? As each reaches his own conclusion, he should bear in mind the Salesians' modesty and passivity, regarding public relations, a trait that some admire and some lament.

If one concludes from random sampling and circumstantial evidence that the Salesians enjoy some success, it behooves one to ask "Why?". Here follow some of the most notable attributes of the Salesians and their work that may contribute to good performance.

1. Spiritual commitment

As when entering any religious order, a young man or woman makes a lifelong commitment, indeed takes ritual vows of poverty, chastity, obedience, and service. The pledge takes on a further specific character: assist and love the children of the world, especially those most deprived of means and affection. The vow is joined to and weighted by centuries of Catholic tradition and more concretely by 150 years of Salesian work. A corpus of literature, lore, and practice, begun by Don Bosco and continued by his successors, serves as further inspiration and guidance to those in the order.

2. Focus

The commitment to poor children, which might have remained a spiritual abstraction subject to individual preferences, was given very specific form by Don Bosco himself. The mission of the Salesians was and is the education and broad human development of poor, disadvantaged, abandoned, and/or orphaned children and youth. Defined even more precisely in practice by Don Bosco himself, the unmistakable "stock in trade," so to speak, of the Salesians has been technical vocational training of poor youth in the manual arts, industrial and agricultural. Al-

though the "method" of Don Bosco, as contained in much Salesian literature, seems vague and abstract, the practice is concrete and unambiguous.

3. The human factor

The Salesian philosophy and practice stresses close, personal relations with the youth they serve and with their families, when they have families. They not only train youth but help rear them in a broad sense. In the eyes of the Salesians, a youth is not an economic unit to be made productive but a human being in the process of formation. Many of the trainees who lack a solid family structure need and receive special counselling. The inclusion of sports is a recognition of the need for youngsters to have physical release and expression, especially after concentration and immobility in the classrooms and the workshops.

Thus, a Salesian programme is not a skills training programme alone, but a broader human development effort. Specialists will not find a Salesian curriculum for this sort of development; it does not exist as a planned set of techniques of human behaviour and reaction. The Salesian approach seems to be an unstructured combination of tradition and intuition that seems to find qualified success. The qualification is that some of the youth drop out for academic, behavioural, or other personal reasons. The approach works for many, but not for all. Training in psychology could be provided to staff in order to attempt to improve the quality of counselling.

4. Standards

The technical institutes operate with clear norms of performance and operation. Classes start and end on time. Trainee performance, presence, and punctuality must meet established requirements. The trainees must have passing grades to continue training and to be advanced. These standards are tested against the market by rendering remunerated services, such as motor repair, printing pamphlets, booklets, etc., and participating in special

projects, like construction in the wake of a natural disaster.

Emphasis is placed on practical, hands-on training. Theoretical and academic exercises are given as a function of practical performance, rather than vice versa. Thus, the institutes are adequately equipped with machines, equipment, and tools for the number of students in training.

Standards not only exist on paper, but are applied and adhered to on a daily basis. Trainees who do not measure up must leave the institute.

5. Long-term continuity

Continuity rests in part on a Salesian's vow for life. If he has been sent from Europe to another country, a Salesian takes this land as his new home for good.

Continuity also derives from the age, maturity, history, and consequent reputation of the institutes. Although the rotation of Salesian managers is fairly regular, personnel changes rarely modify the mission and daily functioning of an institute. Once an institute is established, it is assumed to exist "in perpetuity." Many have decades of experience, stemming from times well before "development" became a universal concern and before governments became interested in skills training programmes. For example, through wars, peace, ceasefires, and the most diversified of rules, the Salesian Technical Institute of Bethlehem has continuously trained teenage Palestinian boys since 1891.

The graduates as well are a major source of continuity. Most of the instructors today are graduates of Salesian institutes. In most places, an alumni association exists that helps in fundraising, counselling, and public relations. There exists, formally and informally, a sense of esprit and fraternity among at least some Don Bosco graduates. Some might call it an "old boy network." In cities where alumni are spread throughout industry and commerce,

Don Bosco graduates are likely to get preferential hearing in job recruitment.

6. Low costs

Because of the Salesians' vow of poverty, the top administrators earn only enough to live a simple life. Their waking hours are given to religious activities and the operations of the institute. As well, the long term ownership of land and buildings minimises capital costs for both housing the courses and Salesian staff.

Administration and bureaucratic procedures are kept to a minimum, sometimes to the chagrin of developmental specialists. Administrative staff are very few. Salesians are by nature "do-it-yourselfers," rather than delegators or employers of others. The physical premises and installations are simple, if not austere, and functional.

The proper use of funds rests on a system of honour and honesty, the vow of poverty, rather than on checks, balances, and audits, even though most of the schools undergo an annual independent audit. Living within a religious community with its own rules, without an individual financial account, a Salesian would have little means to accumulate or to use significant amounts of ill-gotten resources.

7. Sustained financing

Many a Salesian would be surprised and perhaps even irritated to hear that "sustained financing" should be considered an element of their success, given their never-ending struggles and worries about having sufficient resources to keep going. Nevertheless, for over a century the Salesians have been able to operate, expand, and keep up-to-date with contributions and self-generated income, as noted above.

Imbued with religious faith, the Salesians believe and often remark that "Divine Providence sees us through." Regardless of intent or expectation, the Salesians have been able not only to survive but to thrive.

8. Modesty

Salesians generally have a very low public profile. They do no advertising, nor do they seek publicity. On the other hand, in some countries newspaper and television reporting on Don Bosco work is regular, but done at the initiative of the media. While they take pride in their work, which is articulated in terms of trainees' and graduates' accomplishments, it is rare to hear them boast.

The order avoids political and ideological controversy, to the exasperation of a few of its members. Because of the absence of Salesian engagement in the political and social debates of the day, activists tend to classify them as conservatives. Yet it seems that such labeling is more descriptive of the classifiers than of the Salesians, who are engrossed in their practical daily work to the exclusion of intellectual formulations for macro-social and political transformation.

D. Have they done better than others?

Again, there is no case scientifically constructed that sustains the proposition that Salesians generally do better than others or that others surpass them. In fact, given the enormous needs for training, the plethora of circumstances, and the importance of pluralism and experimentation in every field, comparisons between Salesians and others may be of limited use. Clearly the Salesians cannot substitute for the large and reasonably effective, publicly financed, privately administered skills training programmes in countries such as Brazil and Colombia. Nonetheless, perhaps each has something to offer the other.

In any event, it is interesting to ponder the question from the perspective of time: durability and longevity. Comparisons could be done of results obtained currently or of those achieved over the last 50 or 100 years. If one were to wager on future performance, that is, continuity over the next 20 or 50 years, would one give an edge to the Salesians or to another

programme or institution? Clearly a part of Salesian success is based on its longstanding performance, its history, its persistence, its continuous growth, and its ability to adapt. Because of these elements, it is predictable that they will continue doing this kind of work long into the future. What other skills training programmes can present such a record? There are some. The well established technical training programmes of several governments, such as those of Brazil, Colombia, and the United States, to name only three, show every sign of continuing and performing well in their area of focus.

In looking for circumstantial evidence regarding Salesian performance, one cannot overlook the fact that their work, including their technical institutes, were started, expanded, multiplied, and sustained over 150 years in great measure by voluntary contributions. Many undoubtedly made donations out of religious and charitable motivation rather than as a result of detached analysis of development strategies and training results. Nevertheless, this fact stands to the credit of the Salesians. Most other significant training programmes rely on involuntary taxation.

Comparisons must not be stretched too far. The Salesian "niche," so to speak, is training in manual skills for poor youth who are generally unskilled, but with local primary education and bereft of further training or educational opportunities. This focus delimits the fields of training, the socio-economic expectations of the graduates, and the extent of the skills to be acquired. The Salesians do not - and would not - contend that they vie in any way with more advanced training, nor with market-precise, on-the-job training.

As noted above, in many countries, the Salesian technical schools have a good reputation among business and other professions in certain trade skills. Companies tend to seek out their graduates not only because they have learned a skill well, they have acquired a sense of responsibility and conscientiousness that graduates of other programmes seem to lack,

and they have somehow acquired the aptitude to learn more.

Knowledgeable observers (including the study of the Kellogg Foundation mentioned earlier) would make a case that Salesians do better than most governmental - and perhaps other - training programmes on the following bases:

- A Salesian staff, including lay instructors, have commitment, a mystique that expresses itself in conscientious daily work and personal attention to and respect for the trainees. Other programmes tend to be impersonal, and instructors' motivation goes little beyond earning a salary.
- Salesians maintain some standards of comportment and achievement. Others tend to be lax in their hours, testing, and calibre of

training, more interested in the number of trainees graduated than in the quality of training.

- Training is above all practical in nature, "hands-on." Other programmes tend to spend more time and attention in the classrooms, with theoretical lessons, and in "paper exercises." Don Bosco institutes are often more adequately equipped than other vocational schools. And in instances where particularly government institutes are better equipped, the usual criticism is that they are underutilised.
- The Salesians have a long, steady, continuing track record. Many government programmes, in particular, are vulnerable to abrupt change and even discontinuity in accordance with political shifts.

II. Dilemmas and limitations for the future

In general respects no different from any other institution, with its own goals and mores juxtaposed to a difficult, unpredictable, and evolving world, the Salesian Society must face the great world "out there" beyond it, for it is the sea in which it and its young protégés navigate.

A. Technology old and new

Rapidly changing technologies, the consequent shift in the market demand for skilled manpower, and the uneven use and applicability of new technologies in various regions of the world pose serious dilemmas for the Don Bosco technical institutes. The dilemma must be reconciled in the locality where it presents itself in all of its complexities in such places as Bangkok and the Philippines, where the manufacturing and services sectors include the full range of the most technologically advanced multinational firms, labour-intensive industry and commerce, and traditional, artisan, family micro-enterprises.

The usual response of the institutes is to adhere, first of all, to the basics of a skill and to add on more advanced up-to-date techniques where applicable and possible. In the developing countries, most entrants are completely unskilled youth with a mere passable primary education. Some may have scarcely reached a level of functional literacy. Thus, the training objective is to impart the fundamentals of an occupation. In printing, for example, one of the skills usually taught since Don Bosco's time, training begins with the oldest and most simple printing machinery in use locally (some would say "obsolescent," except for the fact that they are in use in local shops) and proceed to more modern printing equipment and techniques also in use locally. The equipment available, old and new, is used in meeting orders from the public for pamphlets, posters, books, etc. The

dilemma is made more acute in that the cost of the latest equipment is extremely high, and donors must be found to finance such expensive purchases.

Closer and more systematic contact with local businesses and the local economy will suggest strategies to confront this dilemma. Until now, these contacts have been rather casual. Nonetheless, the choices may be irreconcilable, that is, between training many of the poor and unskilled to a level sufficient for the "hidden-economy" or selecting more carefully among the less poor and preparing them to work at more advanced technical levels.

B. A job or a business

In many developing countries, the job market is saturated, or it may be contracting. Yet training continues doggedly at the nearby Don Bosco institute. Some graduates cannot find jobs. Others find jobs on contract at less than minimum wage and without job security or usual employment benefits. Others migrate to the capital city in search of employment.

The Salesian response varies according to local circumstances and the imagination of each institute's administration. Some are setting up job placement offices in order to: organise contacts among the institute, local employers, and the graduates; attempt to keep track of graduates from previous years; and gauge better the nature of local market demands for skilled labour and consequently adapt their training programmes to those circumstances. The effectiveness of these job placement offices is yet to be seen, but they are promising.

Others are gingerly investigating ways to help set up graduates in their own small businesses. They are urged on by offers of financing by

international donor organisations, which in recent years have discovered and embraced micro-business and the informal sector as vehicles for equitable development. One such attempt, extremely limited in nature and encumbered by conditions imposed by the U.S. Agency for International Development, is beginning in Cebu, the Philippines. These efforts are risky for the Salesians, whose specialty has been training, not creating or fomenting the creation of new micro-enterprises or in administering revolving loan funds and business advisory services. It may be wiser for the Salesians to limit themselves to that which they do best and develop working relations with other organisations prepared to assist micro-enterprises.

It is interesting to note that in the early 1980's, the Salesian institute in Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic carried out a pilot project to help set up graduates in their own businesses. It was a failure, mostly for lack of entrepreneurial skill among the young men. Yet less than ten years later, graduates are beginning to form and operate their own small service enterprises without any promotion or support. The pattern appears to consist in a new graduate securing a job with a company, developing his skills further, learning how those skills are marketed, becoming frustrated after a couple of years at the lack of opportunity for advancement, finally setting up shop independently with a small number of other Don Bosco graduates, and finding satisfaction in the endeavour, economically and psychologically.

Again, systematic contact with local business, large and small, and the regional economy should provide information essential to devising sound strategies for training youth to make a living as an employee and/or as an independent business person. Don Bosco alumni can also be tapped more effectively on this count, for information and advice.

C. Those too poor to help

Yes, the Salesians help the poor. The international development assistance institutions today want to know "how poor are your poor? Are they the poorest?" The prototypical technical institute can make the case that its trainees are poor, but not the poorest. The institute cannot reach those without primary education, those who are illiterate, those who live and work on farms and in rural villages, and those who must find survival on the city streets.

Yet the Salesians do serve many who have the dimmest possible prospects. Many of the technical schools began as orphanages with rudimentary technical training attached. Some of them still have limited boarding facilities for youth who cannot count on families, be they living or dead. Furthermore, as noted earlier, many institutes have introduced short evening or off-hour courses for those who have to work for their own or their families' keep.

For those too poor for the standard technical institute, the Salesians have other programmes and institutions to attend to abandoned children: new orphanage/school/technical training schools and a variety of open, flexible programmes for street children. The Salesian programmes for street children in Brazil and Colombia have gained international attention such that institutions in other countries are adopting some of their methods.

D. The shift from Europeans to nationals

A discussion of a gradual rise of national personnel - priests, brothers, and laymen - risks encounter with the pitfalls and potential misunderstandings experienced in attempts to weigh the effects of what is usually called "colonialism" or the influence of the Western World on the people of the rest of the world. Yet it would be a major omission to exclude mention of the waning presence of European Salesian personnel in non-European countries and the possible repercussions.

Historically, the Salesian order was spread world-wide, by European missionaries, primarily Italian, secondly Spanish. Some of the strengths they brought with them were a lifelong vow of service, enthusiasm and drive, a work ethic, solid manual skills, and pride in those skills. Except for work in Africa, generally the supply of new European missionaries today is small, while the order has grown with nationals of developing countries. Nonetheless, Europeans often hold the highest positions such as Provincial Superior and Economer (treasurer or finance chief) or director of a technical school. Significant exceptions are to be found in India and some Latin American countries where nationals are in charge. Tensions exist, but are little discussed beyond the confines of the order.

Looking beyond the surface to terrain far more sensitive, a sympathetic observer might ask whether the nationals can match their European forerunners in some areas such as careful administration, the calibre of skills, and the value placed on those skills. Answers are not available, and perhaps the questions are unfair *ab initio*, but the challenge of succession is there.

The shift in the composition of personnel will also have financial consequences. Many of the European personnel have been instrumental in raising funds through direct and continuing contacts with their respective countries - individuals, organisations, embassy personnel, and home governments. These personal lines of contact and fund flows will be diminishing.

E. Planning or relying on Divine Providence

Over the last two or three decades, the Salesians have been discovered by development assistance agencies of the governments of Europe, North America, and Asia. Jaded by repeated failures, mismanagement, and inefficiencies of government programmes, they are anxious to associate themselves through their funding with relatively certain successes. The

Salesian training institutes seem to be ideal candidates. However, from the history of government-to-government work, their requirements have grown into an enormous web of bureaucratic needs for planning, projections, goals, work plans, bookkeeping, budgeting, accounting, and reporting, which seem to shift with every shift in personnel locally or at headquarters. Frustrated by these requirements, a Salesian is apt to remark that, since Divine Providence provided for 150 years, why go through all of this bother and unnecessary work now.

Although the Salesians know how to husband resources and produce enduring results, they are not prepared to deal with this specialised universe of governmental requirements. Few are prepared for the basics of project planning, even required by relatively non-bureaucratic non-governmental donor organisations. Traditionally, they have asked their staunch supporters for money for good works, and they have received it, thanking both the contributors and Divine Providence for generosity and care.

Nonetheless, there is awareness within the Society that significant amounts of additional resources can be secured if its personnel were prepared to engage in more modern methods of planning, administration, and financial management. Consequently, starting in 1989, the Salesian Missions office in the U.S.A. began to provide short courses to Salesian personnel in developing countries in project planning, administration, and evaluation. These courses for beginners have received an enthusiastic reception from both Salesians and international donor organisations. There are many early promising signs of good results; many are producing well conceived and formulated project plans.

These are the first steps in the "professionalisation" of Salesian personnel. Perhaps one of the more interesting "results" of these first steps is an new awareness of the need for training in administration and management.

III. Unfulfilled potential: adapting, opening up, and reaching out

Can the organisation do more and better? The Salesians are asking the same question of themselves. The answer is: theoretically yes, practically maybe. The responses are roughly a juxtaposition of perspectives as to who should adapt to whom. It may help clarify the distinction if one were to simplistically call the Salesians somewhat old-fashioned, and the development world they are beginning to rub shoulders with overly anxious and sometimes maladroitly driven to find something "new and innovative."

A. International development donors

Should the international donor community adapt itself more to the simpler, more straightforward, even traditional ways of the Salesians. The answer is "Yes." The international agencies should simplify their requirements (often so complicated as to be confusing to the administrators of foreign aid programmes themselves) regarding procurement, reporting, property management, audit, etc. They must also learn to respect the autonomy of organisations, Salesian and other, for internal policy, operations, and above all future planning, ceasing to influence donees into becoming something other than what they are. Their notions of the "innovative" and "priorities" - the so-called development fads - ought to be reduced with due humility in the face of 150 years of experience and results.

At the same time, the Salesians should adapt themselves more to the world beyond themselves. The uncomplicated personal touch of the Salesians has been and is at once a great source of strength and a limitation. When faced with requirements for reports, accounts, and audits, a Salesian is apt to remark, "Why don't they trust us?" Many of them, reared under pre-

republic forms of government and society, do not as yet comprehend and accept the workings of civil and constitutional law of a representative republic, in which a religious institution is another form of non-governmental organisation.

According to the most reliable current information, the Salesian Society is registered as an accredited non-governmental organisation (NGO) in developed countries such as Australia, Germany, and the United States of America (and to some extent in Belgium), such that it can sponsor or vouch for the training activities of kin Salesian organisations in developing countries. As of the beginning of 1991, the Society had no such registration in Italy, the country of its birth and flowering, where considerable advantage is offered to Italian NGOs in the national foreign assistance programme.

B. Professional laymen

To many an outsider, the order appears to be too closed upon itself and its programmes, reticent to work with sympathetic outsiders who could play a much more active role and to cede to them more responsibility in the development of its programmes. They have many more resources at their disposal than they often realise or are prepared to mobilise. Until recently, Salesians have tended to rely on their own religious personnel for all functions, other than instructional and secretarial. Only in recent years, for example, have some Salesian organisations begun to hire professional laymen to fill a gap in the skills they themselves lack.

C. Alumni

Although Don Bosco alumni associations exist in many places, they are often little more than a social fraternity with a modest annual fund-raising event. Alumni in general and their associations could be invigorated and integrated into dynamic sources of fund-raising, trainee sponsorship, job placement, business and career counselling, and job market research.

Hundreds, if not thousands, of successful alumni, who received their training for little or nothing, could justly be mobilised to assist their alma mater with monetary or service contributions.

D. The business world

In very few places, for example the Philippines, have businesses been induced to assist the institutes. For companies that consistently hire Don Bosco graduates and, thus, benefit from the training, some form of material support should be a logical expectation. Company donations of machinery and equipment could mutually benefit the institute, the firms themselves, and the trainees. The self-interest of countries aggressively developing international markets for their capital goods could also be tapped for the benefit of all concerned. Salesians in many countries could take more initiative to negotiate with their own governments for assistance originating nationally or through bilateral and multilateral development programmes.

E. Development and training organisations

With exceptions, as always, an institute seems to operate in relative isolation from other local organisations devoted to development activities involving youth. Directors are often not knowledgeable about other training facilities in the area. The possibilities for collaboration and complementarity should be explored locally; the advantages need not be belaboured. As

noted above, there is considerable potential to be explored in the area of micro-business development in co-operation with other organisations specialised in this field.

F. Those seeking knowledge

Except for anecdotal material published and circulated within the order from Rome headquarters and some of the more active provincial centres, there is not much useful, systematic information available about Salesian training and other youth programmes. Salesian personnel generally know very little about their colleagues' work in other countries. Outsiders are often the only transmitters of substantive information on particularly interesting Salesian programmes. Another contradiction of strength and limitation seems to lie in the Salesian commitment to do good and let it speak for itself, largely to the exclusion of an analytical inquiry.

The order has valuable experience to share within itself and beyond to the countless other organisations in the world generally concerned with the future of hundreds of millions of destitute and abandoned children and more specifically with skills training. A good many funding organisations would be willing to arrange for research and its financing; all the Salesians have to do is request this support. Since the Salesians can reach only a tiny fraction of the poor children in the world, the benefit of its experience made accessible to others would be a valuable way to multiply its impact.

G. Internal transparency

In sum, the Salesian Society is a transnational organisation with an impressive history of accomplishments on behalf of disadvantaged children. Within its reach are a whole array of additional resources - human, financial, informational - that it can choose to put to work. At the same time, it has resources - information and experience - of great value to others. Will

it enter a different sphere of using and giving resources in order that it and others better achieve its objectives? First of all, the order would have to open up more within itself to evaluate and share its many training experiences. Will it do so? The best guess is that the process will occur gradually and unevenly because of the very nature of the organisation as a loosely knit religious brotherhood - a culture, if you will - at one and the same time propelled and bound, inspired and circumscribed, by its traditional ways of putting its mission into practice.

In opening up within itself, the Society would hear the need expressed among its own members and staff - and by outsiders - for training in such areas as planning, management, administration, evaluation, psychological counselling, fund-raising techniques, and technical

areas. Individual and institutional contributors are becoming more exacting in such matters, but above all, the objective of serving disadvantaged youth could be more effectively served. Awareness of the need to professionalise key personnel is still scattered and embryonic within the order. And the leap from awareness to the formulation of training plans and the allocation of resources for it is not small.

The challenge to keep up with the changing composition of the order and with the changing world of jobs, business, and technology may be more pressing than the leading elders of the order realise. If this or any other organisation is to help disadvantaged youth cope reasonably well in this world in which we live, it must do its best to know it, deal with it, and in its own way, make its mark upon it.